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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a course of study offered by Bradford College in West Yorkshire, Great Britain, to twenty 16-19 year old students of Asian background who left school alienated from education as a process and school as an institution. The program offers English, prevocational, and vocational courses with the goal of improving the students' attitudes toward school and enhancing their employment potential. The learning environment was built around four objectives: positive staff-student relationships, student involvement in decision making, cooperative rather than competitive learning, and the recognition of individual needs. The program also sought to establish relationships with the families of the students and to recruit greater numbers of women to participate in the course of study. (MK)

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FOR C.E.D. CONFERENCE, LONDON 6th JUNE,
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E.E.C./D.E.S. TRANSITION TO WORK PROJECT
LANGUAGE, PEOPLE & WORK COURSE

Peter Phillimore and Yusuf I. Ahmad

Preface

The CED have asked us to give a contribution which concentrates on topics which are 'down to earth' and 'relevant to educational practice' rather than to write or speak in general and theoretical terms. We've tried to follow this request by organising our contribution in the following way. In this pre-circulated paper we provide a fairly straightforward description of the main features of the course we run, known as the 'Language, People & Work' course (LPW for short). We have made a point of including all the topics that the CED thought that it would be helpful for us to cover. These are as follows:

1. Our Target Group: Recruitment Policy.
2. Recruitment Methods.
3. Organisation of the Course; outline of curriculum.
4. The Learning Process.
5. Links with students' families.

But if these provide the actual relevant details which may be informative to others working in similar educational fields, there are nevertheless a series of more general issues and questions raised, for example, by the mere existence of a course and project such as this one. We cannot possibly ignore these, all the more so as the LPW course as it has developed is shaped by our response to these wider issues. Having pre-circulated this paper, we hope it will give those attending the conference enough basic information about the course we run, to enable us to address a number of more general themes at the conference.

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1. The Target Group: Recruitment Policy.

During the first two years of the project's life we have kept recruitment to 16–19 year olds of South Asian background only, with one exception in either year (1 22 year old woman in the first, a West Indian boy in the second). In line with the demography of Asians in Bradford, the largest single group represented on the course have been Mirpuris, from the Pakistan part of Kashmir. While aiming to avoid the dismissive implications of categories such as 'low achiever' and 'low ability', we have nevertheless recruited from that segment of the school-leaving population which is frequently defined by others in those terms. From our perspective, the students referred to us or contacted by us are young people who have left school alienated in varying degrees from education as a process and school as an institution. Uniformly, they have left school with little or no confidence in their own potential. They vary in the qualifications they leave school with: one or two have a couple of 'O' levels with low grades, between a half and two-thirds have some CSEs. We have aimed in both years to recruit equal numbers of boys and girls, but without success. In the first year, we had a ratio of 4 girls to 14 boys; this year it has been for the greater part a ratio of 3 to 14. In the latter case it has been particularly disappointing for during our recruitment drive at the end of the summer term last year we offered places to 11 girls and 10 boys, only to find that on the restart in September, the majority of the girls had dropped out. Difficulties such as these in recruiting girls are often attributed loosely and uncritically to 'cultural factors', usually meaning family pressure restricting a girl's opportunities. This kind of attribution is too loose to be helpful, however, for it tends to preempt any examination of the variety of factors involved. For instance, of the eight who dropped out between June and September, one went back to school to the 6th form, one obtained a place on another full-time course, one got a place on a YOP course, two obtained permanent jobs, one a temporary job, and in two cases there seems to have been domestic pressure on the girl not to attend college. (The term 'cultural factors' is in any case highly misleading, with its connotations of a static entity contrasted with another static culture that is British: the sort of youngsters we are working with are then described as being 'between two cultures' - a perspective which we regard as more distorting than enlightening. But this is another question.)

We should say a few words about our students in relation to literacy in English. One of the widespread assumptions behind the setting-up of

an Asians-only course was that English language and literacy problems were a key factor in their school performance, and that a special course to overcome these special difficulties would be one answer. In the event, however, the project team came to the conclusion that those we recruited did not display literacy problems that differed very much from those presented by their white peers in the same streams of the same inner city schools. Let us amplify this remark. We had defined ourselves at the outset as not a language course for immigrant children: partly because there already existed some such provision in Bradford; and also because we were interested in providing a course for those who had had the bulk of their schooling in this country. In the first year, 14 out of 18 had lived in the U.K. for at least 6 years, and the remaining 4 had been in the country for at least 3 years. 5 of them had had all their schooling here. In the second year, 10 out of 17 have been here for over 6 years, of whom half have had all their school experience in this country. It is not, then, a course for immigrants, but a course for Asian British 16-19 year olds. In either year we have had a couple of students who had real problems with spoken English, whom we have had to help on a somewhat different basis to the remainder. We took the line that it would probably be possible to manage the extra demands of language assistance so long as we minimised the number of students in this position to one or two each year, and on this basis we have indeed managed. For the remainder, spoken English has presented no problem; on the other hand, for virtually all of them literacy has required a great deal of assistance. The two teachers primarily involved are, nevertheless, convinced on the basis of their past teaching experience that these literacy difficulties are not to be put down to the students being Asian and English being their second language. For the generation now leaving school, many have lived in this country sufficiently long or have had elder siblings speaking English on and off at home, that they switch verbally between Punjabi, Urdu, Gujerati or whatever and English with the greatest of ease. This is a development within the Asian communities' younger generation which has yet to be fully appreciated by educationalists and others we believe. Their literacy problems appear to us to be on a par with those of their white peers in the same schools - i.e. a reflection of the resources devoted to these schools, rather than a facet of ethnicity. In informal contacts with teachers at schools we have encountered some scepticism about the generality of our experience: but while they may suggest that our students could be in some way unrepresentative when compared to their experience of literacy or language problems among young Asians at school, we would counter that too often we feel it is assumed that because they are Asian their problems are different, and that in several instances schools have

referred to us students who are claimed to have some difficulties with language which dissolve once they find themselves in an atmosphere where they can start to build up some confidence in the abilities which they do in fact possess.

For the year ahead recruitment is to be expanded to include West Indians and white students, although the largest single group will remain those of Asian origin. There are a number of reasons for this development. First of all, given that this is not a language or literacy course in the "special provisions for Ethnic minorities" sense of the term, the project team have come more and more to the opinion that the educational content of the course would be just as suitable to other 16-19 year olds in the same position vis-a-vis further educational opportunities and employment prospects as to Asian students. Asians - and West Indians - do have particular problems which can be addressed through a course such as ours. These are to do with the particular experience of being black in Britain today, plus <u>some</u> which derive from domestic tensions and pulls at home. But we reject the notion that there are 'cultural' imperatives for a special and different course for Asians in the position of those we are trying to recruit. A more valid reason, we would contend, for an all-Asian course is to be found in their prospects in the local labour market. Youth unemployment among blacks in Bradford (of whom Asians account for about 90%) is proportionately three times greater than among whites and rising faster. In May 1979 black youth unemployment stood at 28.5% of the total Bradford youth unemployment figure while they account for c.10% of the youth population. The positive discrimination implied in running a course for Asians only would seem to us to be better justified on these grounds than on assumptions about different educational needs being rooted in different cultural backgrounds, so far as our age group are concerned, and it is largely for this reaso.. that we shall continue to recruit more people of Asian background than any other.

There are, furthermore, two additional factors behind our decision to open up recruitment next year. First, that if we take the rhetoric of 'multi-cultural' education seriously, and if we are concerned with responding to the problems posed <u>for</u> young Asians in Bradford at the present, there are advantages in making the course a more <u>realistic</u> mirror of the world outside. An Asians-only course has helped to create an environment in which students lacking in self-belief can discover their potential, but it has done so at the price of creating a cocoon - what we call among ourselves the 'Mother Hen' function of the course. Certain contradictions in society, and especially an examination of racism <u>with their white peers</u>, cannot be explored with our present set-up. After two years' experience we

feel ourselves able to maintain an environment in which black students can feel secure, while taking on the challenge of creating a more socially realistic classroom environment. The change also should enable us to make useful comparisons between the first two years and the next two; and it should not be ignored that if our experience is to be generalised to other contexts, where mixed groups will be the norm, a combination of experience with an all-Asian course and a mixed one will be advantageous. This is not to fly in the face of the political gains made in the acceptance today of the principle of separate provision for minorities; rather, it is an assessment that in this particular instance the advantages are probably outweighed by certain disadvantages. One response to news of this change was: "this is an Asian course - how will whites respond on it do you think?". How often do you hear, "this is a white course - how will Asians respond on it?". Perhaps at one time the latter sentiment used to be voiced, and it may still be felt in certain quarters. But we are now at the point where we wish to move beyond the assumptions and stereotypes implied in the former remark.

The second additional factor to mention is that a considerable proportion, about half, of students and potential students were not happy about coming on an all-Asian course. In interviews we had done of all the people we had been in contact with while recruiting for the 1978-79 course, it emerged that on a level we had not envisaged young people shied away from the opportunity of coming on the course when they realised that it was for Asians only. 'There must be something wrong with it', 'it can't be much use', a common reaction. In interviews with our own former students after their year on the course, about half felt that they would have been happier if it had been an open course, while the remainder stressed that they were pleased to benefit from the security it gave them. The following two quotations from these interviews illustrate the contrasting views most succinctly.

> "People see us, you know, us lot going down to video or wherever, just Asians. They think it's some kind of, you know, learning how to speak or something like that. I mean, if there were a few English kids as well they would have thought of it as a proper course."
> Q. Who is 'they'?
> "Other students, our friends."
> Q. Do you think other students and your friends didn't look on it as a proper course then?
> "No. That's it. I think that were because of all of us being Asians. You know, not English, West Indian, Jamaican or whatever. They thought this was just like....immigrant centre or whatever... or anything for left-behinds."

"I think that's a very good idea (the course being all-Asian), because it gives us the chance to open out and speak and gives us confidence, as when we were at school we were always being pressed for being coloured. But this, we can be proud of this, because this is our course."

The fact that students have been divided among themselves about the benefits of an all-Asian course mean that we would hardly feel we could base a change of direction on this. In addition, the former view represents a taking on board of prevailing racist attitudes - a separate course: what's wrong with it? rather than What's good about it? - instead of a challenge to racist assumptions. Yet having said that, we have been surprised at the strength of feeling against Asians-only recruitment, and it may be said to have reinforced us in our desire to move at this stage to a policy of recruiting white and West Indian 16-19 year olds in addition.

2. Recruitment Methods.

The two main means of recruitment to the LPW course are through the Careers Service and through referral of rejected applicants to other courses in the College. But a variety of means have been tried, including conducting a poster campaign in shops and cafes serving the Asian population, and a slot on the Urdu programme put out by the local radio station, Pennine Radio. In several cases word of mouth has brought interested potential students to see whether the course would suit them. A few statistics from the recruitment effort for this year's course may be illustrative. We contacted over 100 young people one way or another (including a large number whom we had first been in touch with about the course the previous year, to see if any were interested in the possibility of coming on the course at this later date). In all, we interviewed 46 people who were interested, 32 of them before the summer vacation, and the remaining 14 after the course had begun in order to fill places left vacant through people dropping out over the summer. In all, 14 out of the 16 were female. Of the 18 students who have been on the course for some time during this year, they heard about it in the following ways:

through an unsuccessful application to another course at Bradford College, and referred to us by the College Student Services.....3

through the Careers Service.....10

through relatives or friends (inc. one who had been a student in previous year).....3

through recontacting previous year's contacts.....2

The extent to which we have built up a good working relationship with the Careers Officer responsible for liaison with the LPW course is clear from these figures. After two years we now have a far clearer idea than we started out with of which methods of recruitment actually yield results.

The poster campaign (poster written in English) for instance produced no response whatsoever in the 16-19 age group, although it did elicit a few enquiries from an older age range. The slot on Pennine Radio was equally ineffective.

3. Organisation of the course: outline of curriculum.

Work on literacy in English up to 'O' level standard in some cases, and the equivalent with regard to numeracy, form a staple which runs through the course from start to finish. In addition the course provides an introduction to photography, video-filming, and silk-screen printing, first for their own sake, as interesting techniques which are for many students enjoyable, and later with a view to using one or more of these techniques in other work on the course. Various projects are offered at different stages of the year, what is available reflecting as far as possible what it is that students would like to see provided: thus, an introduction to motor mechanics, basic electronics, 'office arts'/secretarial studies and human biology are examples. In the second and third terms a series of topics under the generic title of 'Issues' are introduced for discussion. These examine various aspects of civil and political rights, in such a way as to provide for the imparting of information and the possibility of discussion: thus, the legal position with regard to immigration and citizenship would precede discussion of the issue of immigration, students' experiences, etc. Other topics tackled in these 'Issues' sessions include other dimensions of racism, facts and rights concerning housing, Trades Unions, sex stereotyping and family roles. As we stated in the brief hand-out about the LPW course, we do not regard ourselves as a work preparation course, and give no special importance to work experience opportunities as a matter of course. This is not to say, however, that we are impervious to the possibility of work experience being useful in individual cases, and where we feel it would benefit a student we try to make efforts to arrange such schemes. We have, however, few contacts to arrange work placements with, on account of its fairly low priority, and accordingly there is an element of luck and arbitrariness about the openings that we can call upon.

This is to give a brief survey of the areas we cover on the LPW course. Put like this, nevertheless, it may sound close to being but a variant of the ubiquitous 'social & life skills' programmes so much favoured by the MSC. We ourselves would not be happy with such an equation, as we see our role in a markedly different light; but at the same time we have to recognise that all courses set up for that section of the school-leaving population whose transition to work (or more realistically unemployment) is assumed to be problematic, are subject to many of the criticisms levelled against the

idea of 'social & life skills'. A recent article by a group of sociologists at University College, Cardiff, reflects our position well, even though we may be open to some of the same charges:

> "Overall, then, SLS and similar forms of intervention suffer common limitations at a conceptual level. They remain marginal to the major institutions which they are designed to affect. They give the appearance of amelioration without actual change in the conditions which give rise to the underlying problems. They embody the classic approach to social 'pathology' - a tendency to blame the victim."
> (Atkinson, Rees, et al. 'Social & Life Skills: the latest case of Compensatory Education.' 1980:11)

The authors go on to admit, however, that

> "conceivably...there might be some merit in teaching some version of SLS as a 'subversive' activity...From this point of view SLS might be mobilised to help young men and women to manipulate social events to their own advantage, rather than in an attempt to mould the youngsters for their own good...
> We are sceptical of attempts to <u>remedy</u> the supposed deficiencies of working class adolescents. That does not mean that we deny the value of providing them with <u>extra</u> cultural resources. There is a world of difference between the two positions. The latter recognizes the adolescents themselves as competent, adequately socialised members of a culture and recognizes too their potential ability to 'penetrate' the institutions they encounter." (ibid: 17-18)

In summary, then, we are aware that our position is ambiguous. We are running a course conceived by its planners very broadly within the compensatory tradition and from certain perspectives little different to the range of 'social & life skills' programmes fostered by the MSC. Yet we have endeavoured to redefine the scope of courses such as this in such a way that we conceive of it along the lines spelt out in the second of the two passages quoted above. Some of the following sections indicate how we go about this process.

4. <u>The Learning Process</u>.

The young people who come on the LPW course generally bring with them a specific experience of education and learning. As has been mentioned earlier, this is a negative experience, by and large - (we shall not go into the reasons why here) - they have been treated as a passive factor in the learning process. Their potential has never really been stretched; because they failed to produce the requisite academic responses in static classroom situations they have been labelled failures and treated as such - the makings of a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the past, when employment was easier to obtain, these young people on leaving school generally went on to occupy jobs in the lower, unskilled echelons of the labour market - and hence ceased to be 'problems' for the education system. But given the disruption of this pattern, as a consequence of the present economic crisis, they have come to be conceived of as an 'educational' problem, and it is as a response to this

'problem' that courses such as ours, along with a host of others, have been formulated.

It is in this context that we as a project were faced with the question - what can we as educators do for this group of young people. We unanimously felt that our role would have to be one which would enable our students to be able to evaluate the situation confronting them and take decisions constructively about their own lives - if we were to prevent them being a part of that increasing mass of young people whose response to a bleak employment outlook is passive and demoralised. In order to do this we found that attention had to be devoted not so much to specific teaching methods, as the overall environment within which the learning was taking place. This required trying to overcome the traditional passivity of students in the learning situation as well as a fundamental re-evaluation of their own roles on the part of the teaching staff. We identified four factors which we felt would be conducive to bringing about the environment within which our objectives could be achieved. These were

a) the quality and nature of staff-student relationship
b) the extent to which students are successfully involved in decision making
c) the application of the principles of co-operative rather than competitive learning
d) the recognition of individual needs - thus personal attention and individually compiled work programmes.

It is to these in turn that we now address ourselves.

Staff-Student Relationships

Relations between teachers and the taught have always been hierarchical. Since we felt that good personal relationships between staff and students were essential to what we were trying to do, a great deal of importance was given to attempting to overcome or at least reduce what seemed to the inherently hierarchical character of this relationship. Deliberate efforts were made to break away from old patterns carried over from school. Central to this process was for each of us as teachers to examine critically the way we related to the students - "de-mystification" was a term which cropped up frequently in discussion - the need to present ourselves as fallible human beings with problems of our own, and not as possessors of absolute knowledge was seen as crucial in creating an atmosphere whereby learning could occur in a mutual give and take situation. This practice was, however, not without its own difficulties - for both students and staff. For those of us used to teaching in orthodox classroom situations it resulted in a great deal of insecurity and confusion about appropriate behaviour. The unspoken fear was and to a certain extent still is if the barriers are no longer there, then what? On the part of the students -

initially there was confusion - anxieties surfaced in requests from students for a 'stricter' approach (ironically though the very same students were the ones to say that they would not stay on the course if the rigidity and strictness of school were repeated). However the experience of the course team is that whatever the difficulties encountered in setting up such an informal and open relationship it is the most effective way of encouraging students to communicate and express themselves. To foster the hoped for informality, and the greater confidence in relating to others and communicating which it is hoped will ensue, some emphasis has been given to residential periods together, notably through the inter-project visits with comparable experiments in other EEC countries, but also through a briefer residential stay in the country outside Bradford early in the academic year.

However, we were and are aware that ultimately the relationship remains hierarchical in the sense that the staff are charged with the responsibility to try to bring about changes in the students. In the last resort it is the staff who decide what is best for the project as a whole. One of the most important ways in which we exercise our authority is our insistence that students learn to take responsibility for decisions affecting themselves personally and also the course as a whole. There is no paradox here, for given half a chance students would always pass responsibility for decisions back to us, and it takes continual effort to persuade many of the students that they are capable of taking decisions. This is the issue which we will now move on to discuss.

Student involvement in decision making

How much 16-19 year olds, and in this case 16-19 year olds of Asian background, are used to taking significant decisions in their own daily lives is a moot point. It is all too often assumed that because schools are institutions in which young people find all significant decisions taken for them, they leave school without any decision making experience in their own lives. Yet the timorous and tentative student who comes to college for the first time to enrol on a course such as this may well prove to be fully capable of initiative outside an institution which induces an inhibited style of behaviour. (Given that school experience results in many pupils opting for passivity as the line of least resistance.) This observation, moreover, is as applicable to the kind of student who comes on the Language, People and Work course as to those on academic courses of a somewhat higher level, although these abilities may take a great deal more time and effort to uncover in an educational setting among students used to being 'fed' information - and unsuccessfully at that.

Therefore when the course team talk of student involvement in decision making as an important foundation of their approach it should be appreciated that this is not treated as the introduction of a hitherto unexplored capability. The assumption is made, however, that prior educational experience will have allowed little scope for positive decision making initiative. (After all, non-attendance at school, or the adoption of a passive classroom approach, are the result of decisions made, even if they seem futile and counter productive.)

What kinds of decision, then, does the course lay stress upon? First of all, students are placed in a position of having to attempt their own identification of their educational needs. This in itself can prove a more difficult process than it may sound for people who have been used to having others in authority tell them what their problems are, without having to give much attention to the matter themselves. Sometimes students will reproduce their former teachers' assessment of them, and where the course has references from schools it is possible to introduce these into the discussion. Gradually it is hoped that students will reach beyond the judgment of others, and begin to think for themselves. Some master these new demands on them more swiftly than others, as is to be expected, while in a few instances teachers have to admit that little or no progress seems to have been made. The principle here is that self-recognition of needs is invariably preferable to a diagnosis from outside, however accurate the latter might prove to be. If a student can formulate for himself that he has difficulty grasping the idea of fractions, to take an example, or that his problems with written English concern particular points of grammar which threaten to count against imaginative thinking in any examination, then in the experience of this course the motivation to work on such specific areas of difficulty is all the greater.

It is also worth saying that students have to learn that the very fact of making the step from school to a college brings with it certain new expectations and responsibilities. In relation to this particular course, students learn that to an extent which is new to them it is up to them how effectively they make use of their time. There is no battle of wits with authority to provide a more lively and challenging source of amusement than is offered by the timetable, as they may have found to be the case at school, because for the reasons pointed out earlier we strive to avoid defining their roles in terms that are immediately recognisable from school experiences.

A symbol and focus of the decision-making powers of the students collectively is the weekly course meeting, which is seen as an important

feature of the course. Chaired by each student in turn, and also minuted in rotation by two students each week, these meetings provide a review of the week's activities, a forum for planning ahead (the students' best opportunity to discuss together and with the staff the shape the course ought to take), and thirdly a forum for any disciplinary matters at which students have the chance to think through and make decisions about the limits of tolerable behaviour and the various sanctions possible. The staff responsibility here is to ensure that students' decisions remain within the bounds of feasibility, and that, having taken a decision collectively, the students make a consistent effort to uphold them. Where course meeting decisions are consistently breached by the very students who had been keen on their introduction - a state of affairs which occurs periodically - staff initiative is required to bring this state of affairs back to the attention of the course meeting. Examples of such decisions made, and breached subsequently, include a ban on smoking in class, and penalties for latecomers. It must not be supposed, having said all this, that these meetings were suddenly put into operation. In each of the two years there has been a great deal of resistance, not to the idea of such a meeting (in the first year it was the students' own idea), but to the implications that ensue for their own behaviour. It provides a very real test-ground for their ability to take decisions and then to push them through.

The kinds of activity which students may be asked to take responsibility for - quite often as a result of decisions agreed on at the weekly course meeting - have included various aspects of the inter-project visits, such as planning routes, discovering the various procedures necessary to obtain or renew passports and arranging food requirements for such journeys. Other examples would include planning project work and deciding what materials and equipment need ordering. Obviously some of these tasks demand capabilities that are beyond certain of our students. In any event staff involvement entails a great deal of assistance, to point students in the right direction and to make sure that they are not asked to attempt something too complicated for them, which might only serve to dispirit them. But by working with others, it is usually possible to observe how students who are initially tentative develop to the point that they are prepared to take on responsibilities they would have avoided earlier.

Personal tutorials too, with each student having an individual tutor whom he/she should meet every fortnight, provide an opportunity for self examination and the chance to think about areas where decisions are required.

Co-operative Learning.

Early on in the project's life we became convinced that a significant amount of the timetable should be based on co-operation within small groups, or project learning. This certainly was no innovation and arguments both for and against project learning have been with us for a long time. All the same our rationale was two-fold. First, there was a conscious rejection of the principle of competition which remains a characteristic of much educational practice, and under which our particular students had not thrived. Second, it was felt that by working together, students for whom self-belief had always been a problem would benefit from being able to pool their ideas with others, without being penalised (by low marks or poor results) and having their confidence in themselves depressed even further. Students who are more knowledgeable or learn quicker are encouraged to play an active part in themselves helping to teach the others. Of course, it must be recognised that the contrast is in practice less clearcut: the course members inevitably make their own assessment of characteristics such as intelligence, quick-wittedness and imagination or confidence, and it is as easy to become the half-wit or the fool of the group in a setting based on co-operative learning as in any other. The enforced collectiveness of the time in Caen during the recent exchange with another EEC project bore this out. Nevertheless our experience leads us to argue that the kind of co-operation we advocate and have used a great deal gives the slower students a chance to develop a new image of themselves, as they are encouraged to try activities and develop skills that on their own they would almost certainly lack the confidence to attempt.

Co-operative learning also makes particular demands on the teaching staff and has its own pitfalls. It frequently requires that a teacher has to learn as much as the students when a project is initiated. Rather than having the teacher maintain the traditional all-competent facade, this project attempts to extract benefit from a situation in which both teacher and taught are learning together. Providing that the teacher has planned with sufficient clarity what it is that the group are endeavouring to learn about, this way of working need not lead to the kind of chaos that critics may imagine. Its rationale is indeed that it encourages in another way that same student initiative and preparedness to take responsibility that has been discussed earlier. One pitfall however which has been encountered, and which reflects very well the kind of difficulty which in practice confronts a teacher, is the tendency to gravitate towards the brighter students in a project group, especially in the more academic projects. We have yet to resolve this satisfactorily, but it is worth stressing that this is not a problem confined to this mode of working alone, and will be recognised at

least as much by teachers in an orthodox classroom setting.

At the start of the course this year students had a five week induction period during which they were allowed little scope for personal choice, the content having been decided for them in advance. The aim was not only to learn something about the abilities of each student in the core subjects of English and Maths, but equally important to introduce them to modes of working which were probably new to them, including the practice of working together in small groups for a common purpose. A great deal of thought went into the planning of this induction. We considered that, while it was important to discover something about levels of ability in English and Maths at the outset, too strong an early emphasis on these subjects would tend to reinforce school academic failures. By concentrating rather more on project work in this initial period we hoped to establish a strong sense of individual worth, and to convince them through this work that they were capable of a reasonably high standard of achievement. Three skills were introduced to students. All were broadly speaking art-based, but the rationale for choosing them was their usefulness in a wide range of projects of different kinds. These three skills were video-filming, photography and printing (silk screen). These were conceived not simply as pleasant activities in themselves, but as useful skills to call upon throughout the course of the year, and which in addition had a 'communication' function comparable to English and Maths. Consolidation of these skills introduced at the beginning has come through a repeated use of photography to document various activities, including the exchange with the Caen project; while the elements of knowledge about video work has formed a useful basis for the participation of a small number of students in a Yorkshire Television film project.

Last year's projects were: interior decoration and design; practical electrical skills; office arts; generic skills (which included an introduction to the use of tools, rudiments of motor mechanics, and woodwork); economics; and fashion. This year to date projects have been: electronics (at a far more sophisticated level than last year); motor mechanics; office arts; woodworking; and a project based around biology, covering aspects of health and caring activities. Projects are seen as a vehicle for breaking down some of the ways in which knowledge and skills are usually categorised. We consider that there is little point in simply teaching a technique or learning rudimentary skills without drawing connections with other related activities and examining their place in the real world outside the artificial classroom environment. Thus, to take one example, the hope is that the motor mechanics project will involve not only an introduction to some basic mechanics, but will also involve students making an examination of the motor industry, the way it is organised locally and nationally, the kinds of work

and conditions of service, as well as touching upon environmental aspects of the motor car's use. This in turn provided a meeting point with the Biology project which approaches environmental pollution from another angle. Thus two completely different projects are seen to bear on each other in ways which students might not have previously considered.

Recognition of Individual Needs.

Complementing the co-operative learning has been the principle of providing each individual with his/her own work programme, tailored to individual levels of ability and speed of learning. This is applicable particularly in the basic subjects of English and Maths where skills and abilities vary enormously. In Maths this year one student is studying for 'A' level within the college, and receives supplementary assistance from the Maths teacher on this course when he needs it; three students are at very different stages of an 'O' level course; while the remainder are of various abilities down to two who have very basic problems with numeracy. In English there is the same variation. Moreover, while individual problems for some students concern grammar and sentence construction, others are receiving help in special oral communication sessions. But individual programmes are not confined to English and Maths, and there is scope even within the co-operative work described in the last section for individuals to develop at their own pace. A student with a particular interest in electronics, let us say, would be given the attention necessary to take him/her beyond the point reached in the project work; while equally a less able student would either be given a less demanding task within a project, or else would receive extra support outside the time devoted to the project to enable him/her to participate more fully.

Another aspect of the recognition of individual needs is the importance attached to tutorials, mentioned earlier. These provide a useful way of getting students used to thinking constructively about their own working progress, and the kinds of work they ought to be moving on to, thereby keeping alive the very important element of momentum which students need to feel individually. In theory, they also enable the course team to fulfil a counselling function which is considered a vital part of the work of the project. In actual practice, however, as both years have progressed tutorials have become more and more redundant for this particular task. This is not at all to suggest that the counselling function is being neglected. Rather, as each year has unfolded students have relied less and less on the formal opportunity presented by tutorials, and have turned to members of staff on a more ad hoc basis, as and when they need to. The counselling function is, therefore, spread rather than diminished, and is central to the success of the curriculum.

We still consider that tutorials retain some value, not least because a certain number of students would almost certainly shy away from any one to one meeting were they not obliged to do so. Furthermore, tutorials provide a useful opportunity to complement the work of the Careers Service Adviser working with the project, for on these occasions the question of what a student hopes to do after the course finishes is kept constantly in sight.

We shall now go on to examine the relationship of the project to the home situation of the students.

5. Links with students' families.

Links with families have not been developed systematically but rather on an ad hoc basis, dictated as often as not by the occurrence of difficulties which required contacts to be established or strengthened. Nevertheless, efforts have been made at various points during both years to meet and get to know as many of the families of our students as possible. Interviews sometimes provided the first occasion for meeting. Also, after a false start last year, we arranged an informal gathering with parents and other close relatives of students, in the middle of the year. The notable thing about this, we felt, was not that we held such a gathering, for schools do so regularly, but that we obtained such a high proportion of families visiting, and in the context of developing relationships with parents we regarded it as extremely helpful. But in both years it has been the imminence of a residential trip away, and especially our visits abroad to similar EEC projects which have brought the course team into close touch with a large number of the families. Whether to give permission to a son or daughter to come away to Denmark or France, or on a lesser level to stay out during the evenings while our course has acted as hosts to the Danes and French, are issues that have in many cases brought families and staff together, so that we can explain and justify our activities. Families have appeared to be encouraged to see one or another of us, to explain at first-hand the purpose behind such visits and to be reassured about their offspring's activities on the course. If this seems a complacent evaluation of what remain fairly superficial ties we would just point out that in virtually every instance we have been able to talk parents round to permitting their child's participation in these exchanges. This in itself belies many of the more conventional judgements often made about the difficulties faced in enabling Asian girls to participate in activities, and the pessimistic assertions to the effect that we will not have any luck. A great deal of tea and several meals taken in the student's home may be the key to gaining parental consent, but the plain fact is that brought into consultation about the nature and purpose of such features

of the course, parents have always been happy to go along with our requests.

Only in one case have we failed completely to establish a sound relationship with a student's family. In this case we were unable to do anything about a family's adamant refusal to allow their daughter to attend college at all; and having run away from home to seek the protection of the social services after the use of violence by her elder brother, with the threat of worse to come, this girl eventually felt that there was little alternative but to return home, and to allow herself subsequently to be moved away from contact with and influence by the college (from the family's point of view), and from her brother's threats (from her own point of view) to another town where relatives lived.

We would like to conclude with some remarks made by our students, which reflect the differential ways in which the course affects different individuals.

"It's freer than I expected - thought it would be more like school - teachers would be stricter and take decisions."

"It's totally different to what I expected before it started. It's a change when you're left to make decisions. If school were more like this people would work better. Well, I suppose some might take advantage."

"We'd all work better if staff were stricter...people mess about, they get crazy, and just waste time."

"I'm not given enough work to do."

"I knew kids at school whose parents used to push them s[illegible]ard. Parents would come and say to teachers - 'push my kid hard'."

"I've learned more here than I did at school."

"I thought teachers would lead you more - if we had an interest - I thought if we wanted electronics you'd lead us to it. I've learned a lot - I feel more confident - it's just we're freer."

"It's much like I expected. I thought I might get a better job if I came here, and that I might improve special subjects to get a better job...yes, I think it might. It's different to school - if we smoked we had to go to the toilet, and if we were caught we had to have detention."

"You're trying to get us a better job - help us with English and Maths."